

Ms. TREE

TM
No. 9

WELL, MIST - IT'LL
TAKE YOU MORE THAN
A MINUTE TO SOLVE
THIS MYSTERY!



Notes from SURF CITY

by Jan & Dean Mullaney

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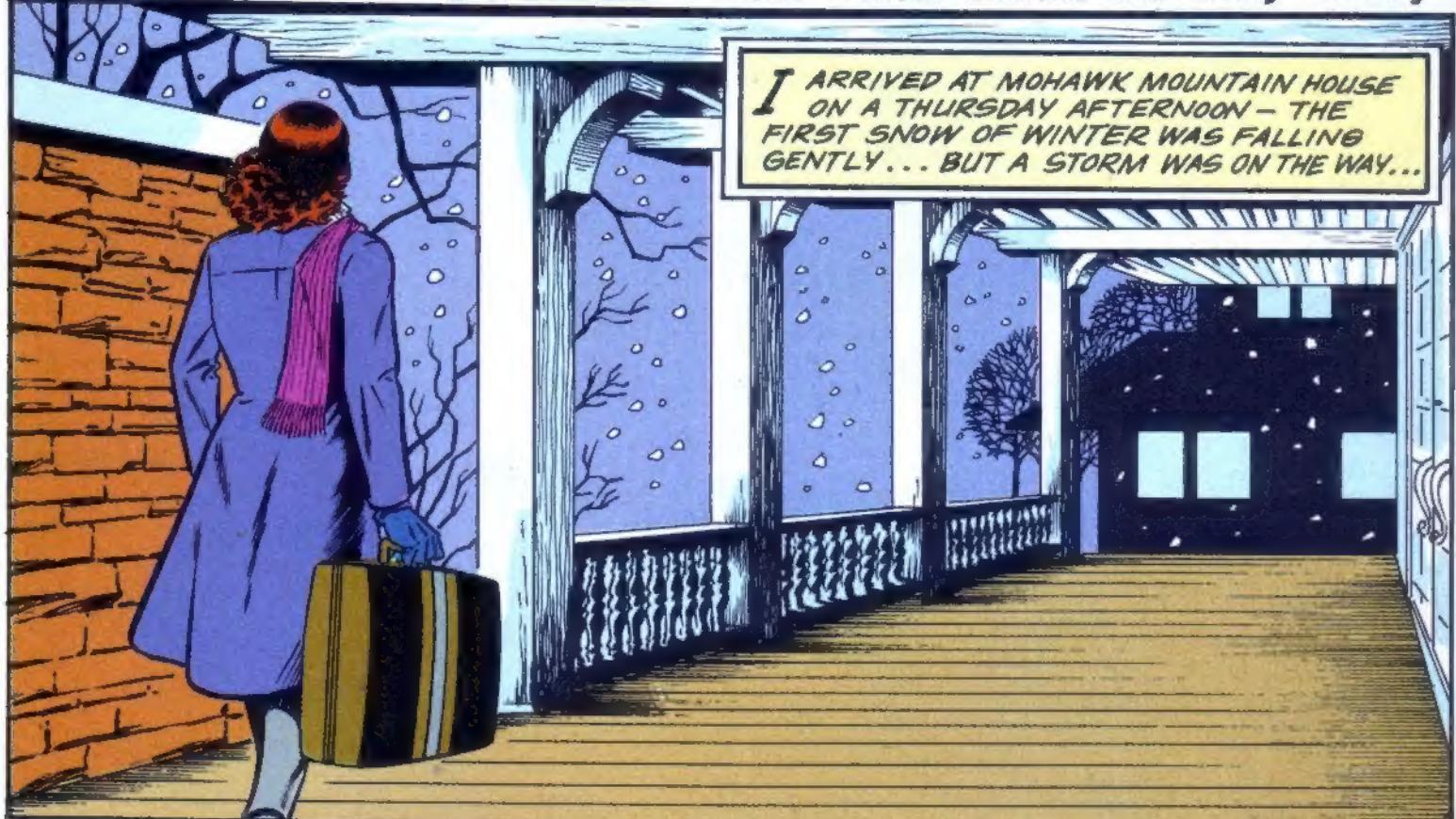
MURDER *at* MOHAWK

A MIST-TREE TALE

PART ONE

© 1984

Max Collins and Terry Beatty



I NEEDED A REST - NEEDED SOME PROVERBIAL PEACE AND QUIET, AFTER THE EVENTS OF RECENT MONTHS ... WHICH EVEN I HAD TO ADMIT HAD TAKEN THEIR TOLL ON ME ...



ONE OF MY BUSINESS ASSOCIATES, ROGER FREEMONT, HAD RECOMMENDED MOHAWK - A RESORT HOTEL THAT HAD BEEN AROUND SINCE THE 1860S, TUCKED HIGH AWAY IN THE MOUNTAINS UPSTATE. THIS WAS OFF-SEASON, AND THE PLACE SHOULD BE AS RESTFUL AS A MONASTERY - BUT LESS CROWDED -



ART ASSIST & LETTERING: GARY KATO / EDITOR: DEAN MULLANEY / COLORING: JAN BRUNNER

SCANNED BY KCBURBS-DCP!

I WAS SIGNING THE GUEST REGISTER WHEN I HEARD A FAMILIAR VOICE -

MICHAEL TREE ! WHAT IS THIS, A PRIVATE EYE CONVENTION ?



IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, MS. TREE - WHAT'S A NICE GIRL LIKE YOU DOING IN A MAUSOLEUM LIKE THIS ?

RESTING, MIST - SO KEEP THAT IN MIND ... LET'S NOT GO STUMBLING OVER ANY CORPSES, SHALL WE ?



HEY ! WHAT KIND OF TALK IS THAT ?

BEING A CLIENT OF YOURS IS LIKE HAVING A TICKET ON THE TITANIC .



I ADMIT I'VE LOST A CLIENT OR TWO - I'VE SEEN MY SHARE OF MURDER - **MORE** THAN MY SHARE ...

BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE ME A JINX ! CAN I HELP IT IF WHEN THE STAKES ARE HIGH, THEY CALL MIKE MIST ?



I'LL GET THIS FOR YOU - THERE'S NO BELLBOYS, HERE .

WHY NOT ?



"IN OFF-SEASON THEY RUN THIS PLACE WITH A SKELETON CREW - THAT'S WHY THE RATES ARE SO REASONABLE, YOU COULDN'T **AFFORD** THIS JOINT IN THE SUMMER - ME, EITHER . "



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, MIGT ?

DOING A LITTLE BODYGUARD WORK - AND IT AIN'T A BAD BODY, EITHER -



DOING BODYGUARD WORK, HUH? IS YOUR CLIENT DEAD YET?

GIMME A BREAK-

ALL RIGHT - IF YOU WEREN'T A PRETTY GOOD DETECTIVE, I WOULDN'T FARM OUT MY OVERFLOW TO YOU, LIKE I DO.

DON'T DO ME ANY FAVORS, LADY - MY AGENCY CAN BARELY HANDLE ITS OWN CASELOAD! ON THE OTHER HAND... IF YOU DO HAVE ANY OVERFLOW...

MIST - GET OFF MY BED -

THERE'S NO TV IN THESE ROOMS - WE MIGHT AS WELL START PLANNING OUR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES...

LOOK, MIST - I LIKE YOU - YOU'RE CRAZY, SO WE'VE GOT A LOT IN COMMON. BUT I DON'T HAVE ROOM FOR ANYMORE "MIKES" IN MY LIFE... PARTICULARLY NOT ANY PRIVATE-EYES.

I MISS THAT LUGHEAD HUSBAND OF YOURS. HE WAS THE BEST P. I. IN THE BUSINESS...

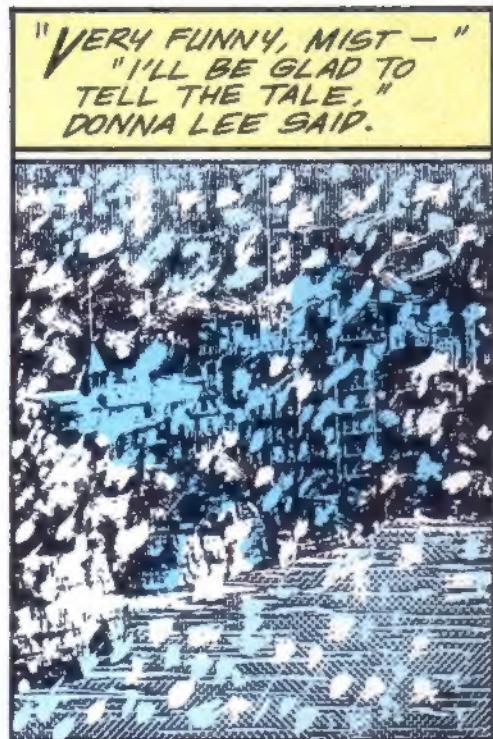
THAT HE WAS. YOU SHOULD SEE HIS SON...

"MY SON, NOW... HE'S LIVING WITH ME; STAYING WITH MY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, RIGHT NOW - I THINK HE'S GOT A CRUSH ON HER."

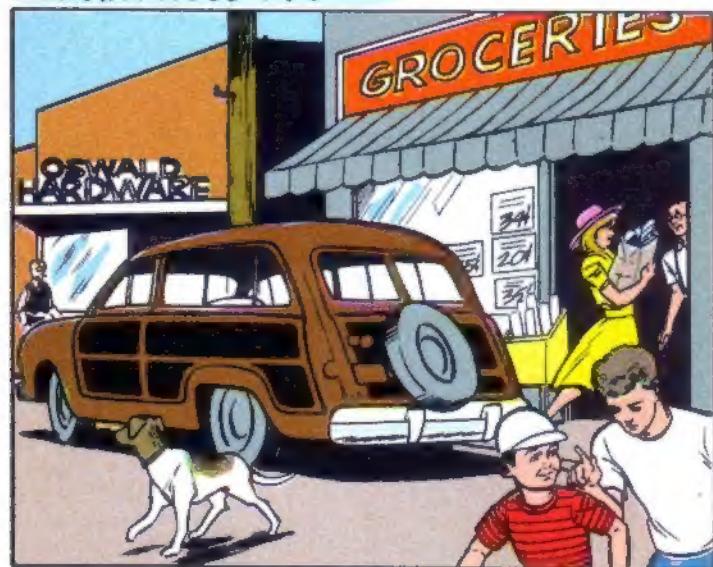
EFFIE, YOU MEAN? THE KID'S GOT GOOD TASTE.

WHY DON'T YOU BUY ME A DRINK? WE CAN INSULT EACH OTHER BETTER, THAT WAY...





"IT WAS JUST THIRTY MILES FROM HERE - AND THIRTY YEARS AGO - IN A SLEEPY LITTLE TOWN CALLED GRANTWOOD..."



"THERE WAS ALSO A SLEEPY LITTLE BANK, IN WHICH THE SURROUNDING PROSPEROUS FARMING COMMUNITY HAD PUT A LOT OF MONEY -"



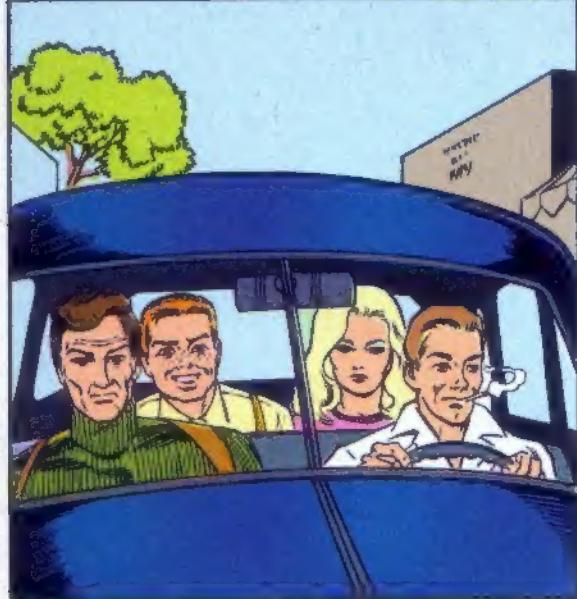
"AND THE LEGENDARY LATTERDAY DILLINGER KNOWN ONLY AS KARPER PLANNED TO MAKE A WITHDRAWAL."



"HE HAD WITH HIM THAT DAY THREE ACCOMPLICES - EX-STRIPPER SELMA DEVINE, HIS MISTRESS; 'WHEELS' COGG, THE DRIVER; AND 'BABY-FACE' BLOCK, THE PSYCHOPATHIC BUT FEARLESS GUNMAN."



"KARPER HAD FALLEN ON HARD TIMES — HE OWED THE SYNDICATE BOYS BIG MONEY, FOR A GAMBLING DEBT — "



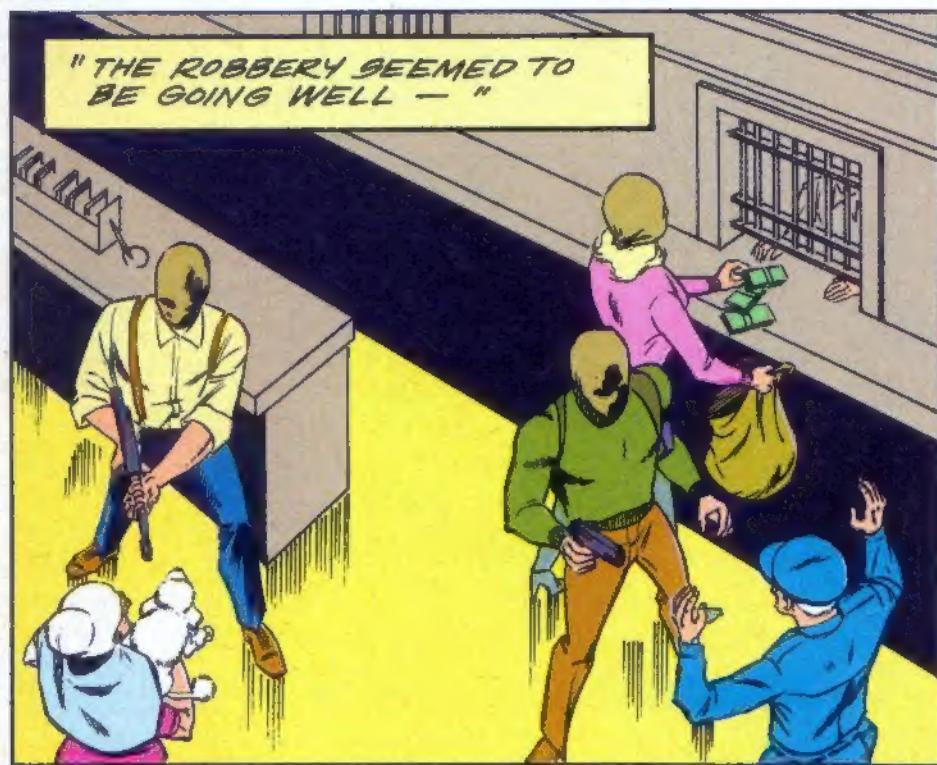
"OTHERWISE, HE WOULDN'T HAVE PUT SOMETHING TOGETHER THIS HASTILY — OR WORKED WITH ANYONE AS UNSTABLE AS 'BABY-FACE.' "



"UNNECESSARY VIOLENCE JUST WASN'T KARPER'S STYLE — "



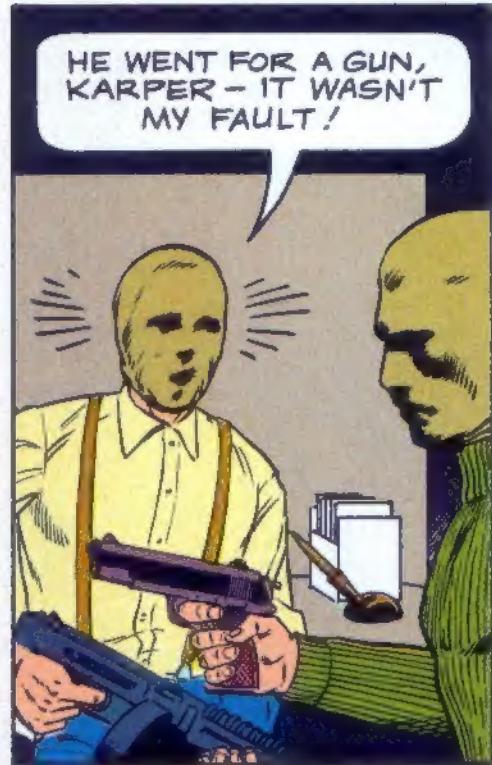
"THE ROBBERY SEEMED TO BE GOING WELL — "



"TILL ONE OF THE BANK GUARDS SNEEZED — "



HE WENT FOR A GUN, KARPER — IT WASN'T MY FAULT!



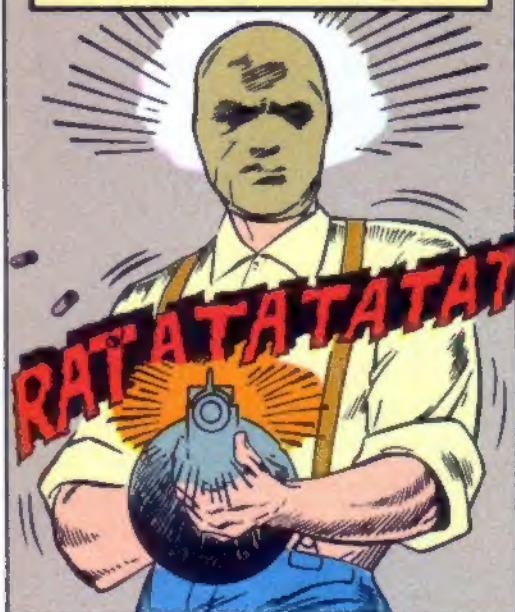
WHY DON'T YOU SIGN MY NAME ON THE DOOR, YOU LITTLE PSYCHO —



"AND THEN 78-YEAR-OLD MOLLY EARLE'S PUPPY BARKED."



"AND BABY-FACE
OVER-REACTION - "



"KARPER'S PLAN WAS TO SPLIT UP IN PAIRS - THEY CHANGED CLOTHES, GOT INTO SEPARATE, FRESH CARS; AND THEN - ONE PAIR AT A TIME - CHECKED IN AT THE MOHAWK."



BUT IF THE MOHAWK WAS ONLY THIRTY MILES AWAY FROM THE ROBBERY SITE -



KARPER WAS BOLD THAT WAY -

"HE BELIEVED IN HIDING UNDER THE COPS' NOSES; THEY'D NEVER SUSPECT IT... ONLY THE NEXT MORNING, WHEN KARPER'S MISTRESS WOKE UP -"



KARPER'S GONE!
I'VE LOOKED ALL OVER THE HOTEL FOR HIM...

WHAT ABOUT THE MONEY?



IT'S... IT'S GONE, TOO -

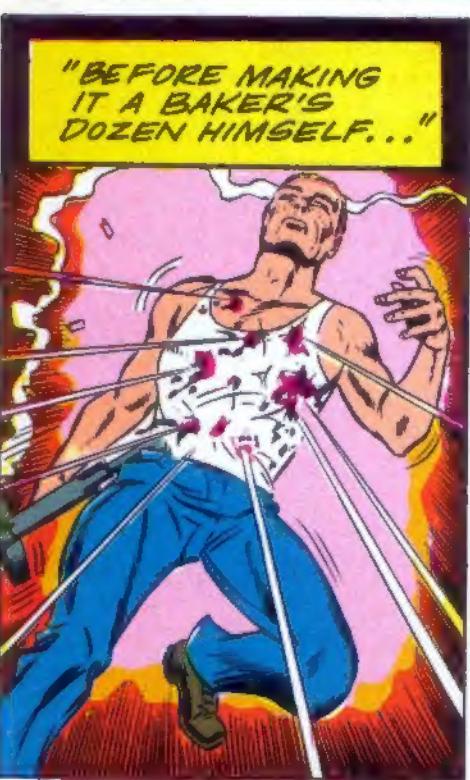
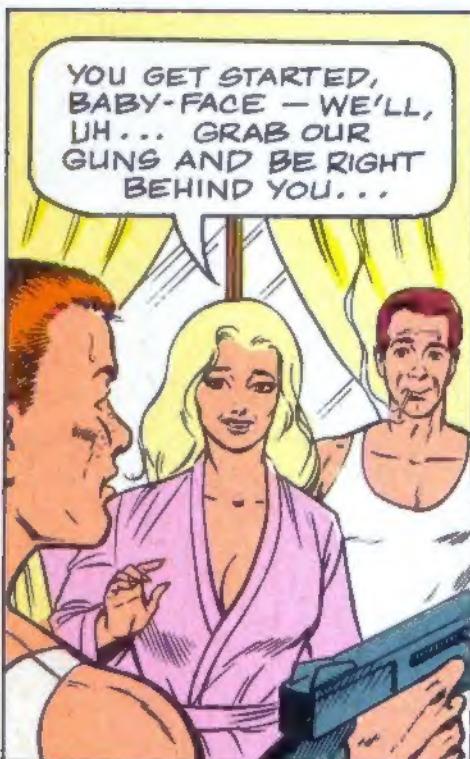
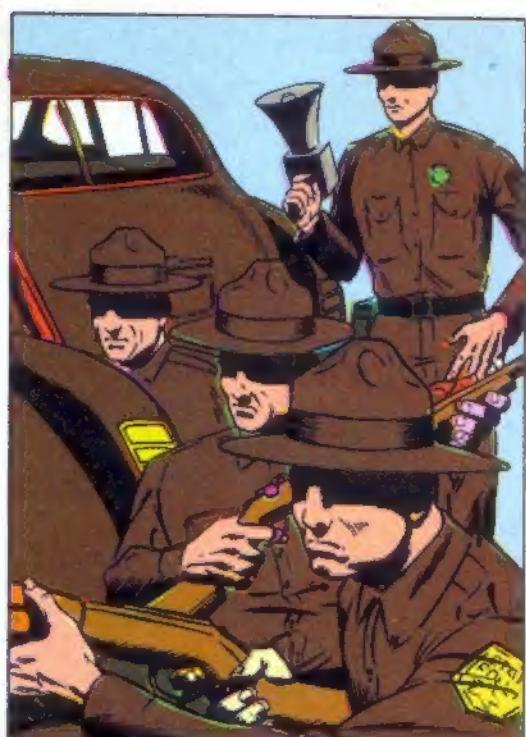


WHERE'S BABY-FACE?

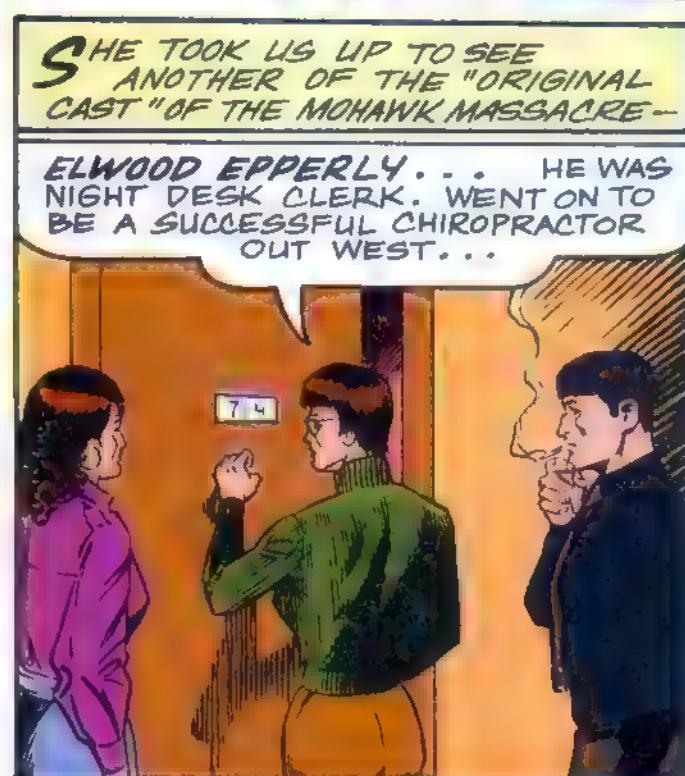
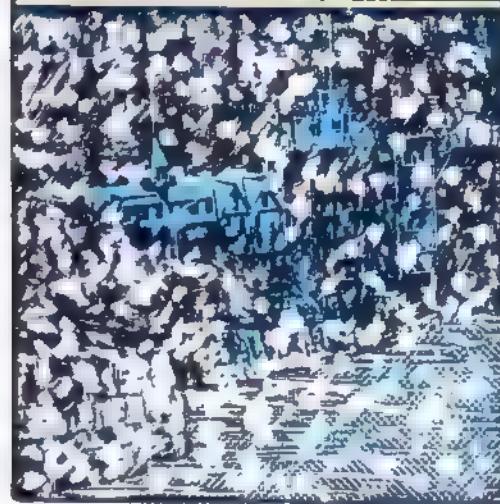
HE GOT UP TO GET SOMETHIN' TO EAT - WHAT'LL WE DO NOW?



GRAB YOUR GUNS!



"WHAT KIND OF RESEARCH
DO YOU HOPE TO DO
HERE?" I ASKED.
"THE CURRENT OWNERS
BEGAN HERE AS
MANAGERS, THIRTY YEARS
AGO," SHE SAID.



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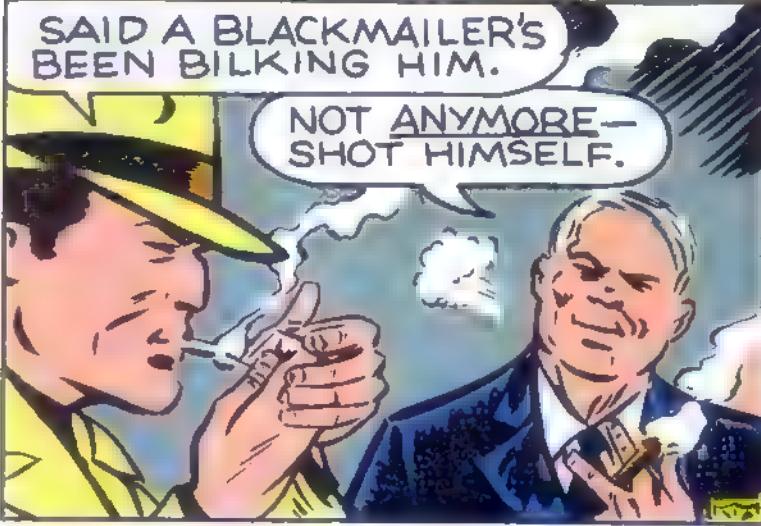
MIKE MIST

Death Comes Special Delivery

MIKE MIST / MINUTE MIST-ERY
PRIVATE EYE © 1979 by Collins and Beatty



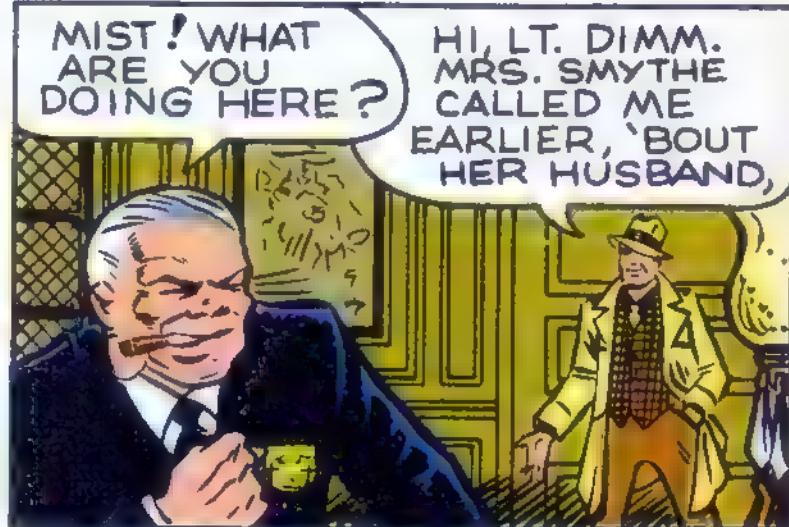
WHEN I ARRIVED AT MY CLIENTS' HOME, THE MORGUE BOYS WERE JUST LEAVING...



SAID A BLACKMAILER'S BEEN BILKING HIM.
NOT ANYMORE—SHOT HIMSELF.

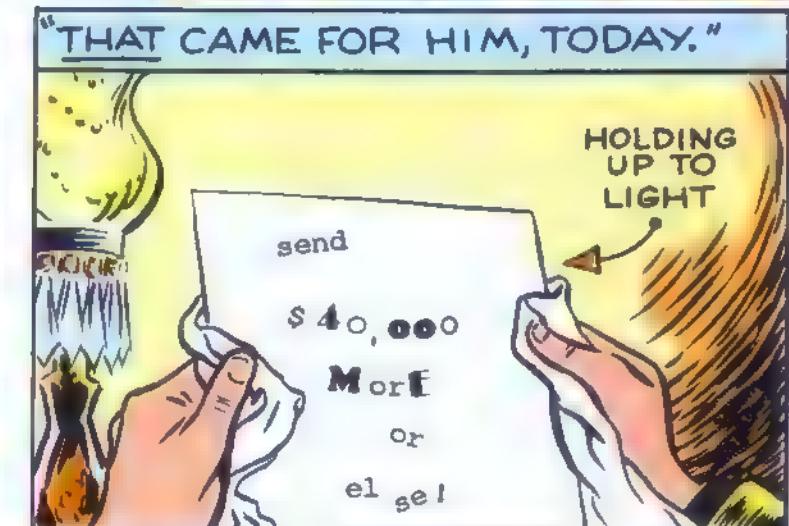


MR. MIST, I DON'T KNOW WHO WAS BLACKMAILING PETER, OR WHY—I SIMPLY TOOK HIS MAIL TO HIM AND THEN—CHOKE—



MIST! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

HI, LT. DIMM.
MRS. SMYTHE
CALLED ME
EARLIER, 'BOUT
HER HUSBAND,



THAT CAME FOR HIM, TODAY.

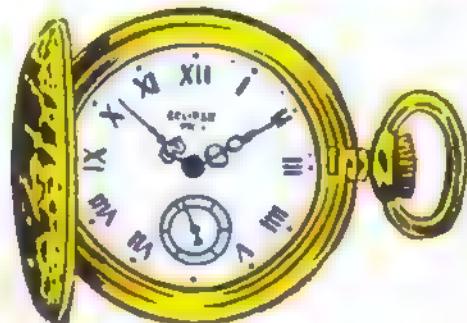


SORRY MRS. SMYTHE—CAN'T TAKE YOUR CASE... AFTER ALL, THERE IS NO "BLACKMAILER," AND I DON'T WORK FOR KILLERS!

PLANTED AFTER THE MURDER, THE LETTER WAS UNCREASED, LACKING A REAL LETTER'S FOLDS.



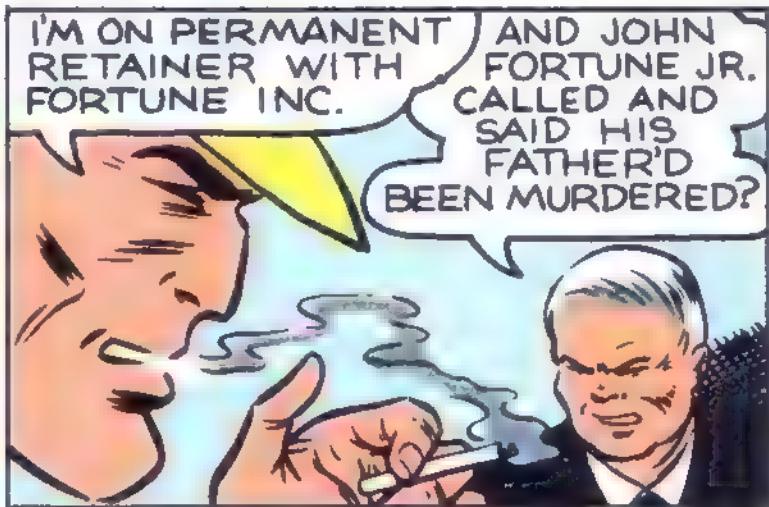
ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
SEPT. 10, 1979
(FIRST APPEARANCE
OF LT. DIMM)



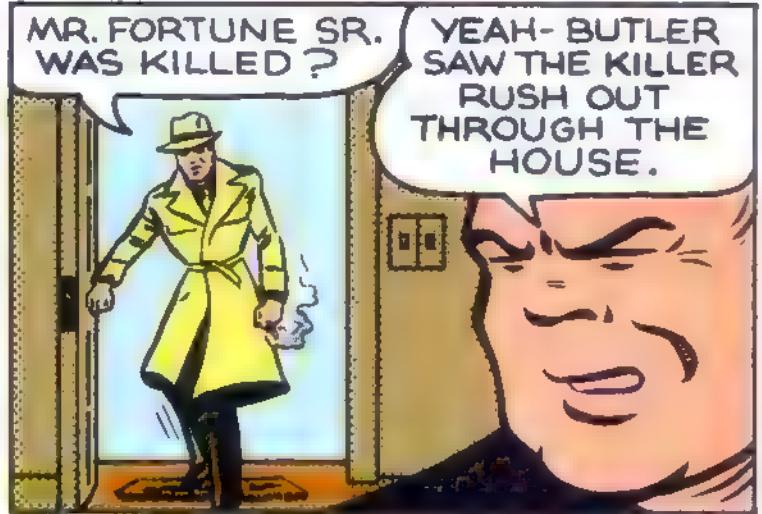
MIKE MIST

MIKE MIST

Murder's a Messy Business
A MIKE MIST / MINUTE MIST-ERY
PRIVATE EYE ©1979 by Collins and Beatty



"RIGHT. WHAT'S THE STORY?"
"BURGLAR CLIMBED IN THE WINDOW AND WAS SURPRISED BY THE OLD BOY."



YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE IN THE HOUSE?

YES- MR. FORTUNE JR. WAS ABSENT.



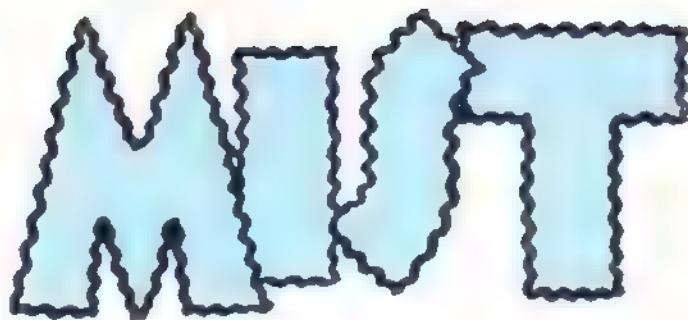
ASSUMING NOTHINGS BEEN TOUCHED, I'D SAY THE BUTLER DID IT!



ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
SEPT. 17, 1979



MIKE MIST



His Last Act...

A MIKE MIST / MINUTE
PRIVATE EYE / MIST-EY

©1979
by Max
Collins
and Jerry
Beatty

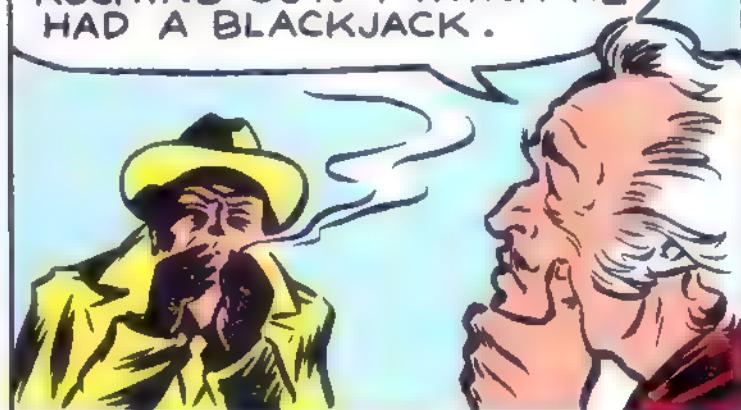


LT. DIMM CALLED ME TO THE
YORRICK THEATRE - A CLIENT
OF MINE WAS DEAD.

HE WAS RIGHT - WE FOUND HIM
SLUMPED THERE - BLUDGEONED,
WHILE REMOVING HIS MAKE-UP
AFTER THE SHOW.



HE WAS A STREET THUG -
BIG, BURLY GUY - CAME
RUSHING OUT. I THINK HE
HAD A BLACKJACK.



MIST - I
UNDERSTAND
ACTOR LEWIS
LEEDS HIRED
YOU RECENTLY.

YEAH - HE WAS
CONVINCED HIS
LIFE WAS IN
DANGER.



A COUPLE DOZEN
PEOPLE - FROM
STAGEHANDS TO
STARS - WOULD'VE
HAD ACCESS -

YEAH,
BUT HIS
UNDERSTUDY,
N. V. HESS,
APPARENTLY
SAW THE KILLER.



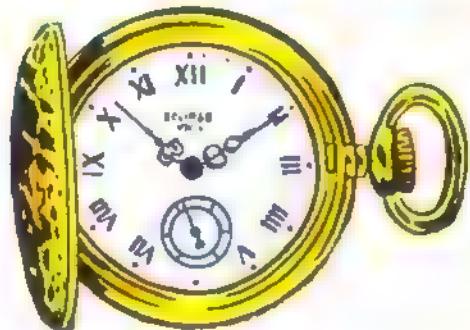
YOU'LL NEED A BETTER ACT
THAN THAT TO CONVINCE
A JURY, HESS!



ONLY A "FRIEND" COULD'VE STRUCK THE
DEATH BLOW; LEEDS, SEATED
BEFORE A MIRROR, WOULD'VE TURNED
TO DEFEND HIMSELF, HAD A STRANGER
ENTERED TO ASSAULT HIM.



ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
OCT. 22, 1979



MIKE MIST

MIST

Trick or Trick

©1979 by *Collias and Beatty*
MIKE MIST / MINUTE MIST-ERY



I APPRECIATE YOU COMIN' OVER TO KEEP ME COMPANY TONIGHT WITH MY WIFE OUT OF TOWN AND ALL.



MAYBE YOU CAN HELP ME ANSWER THE DOOR, WHEN THE TRICK-OR-TREATERS COME CALLIN'.

THERE'RE SOME NOW- I'LL GET IT.



TRICK OR TREAT FOR UNICEF— ANY SPARE CHANGE, MISTER?

SURE—STEP INSIDE—



YOU'RE A LITTLE OLD FOR THIS, AREN'T YOU?

AGE AINT IMPORTANT— YOU'RE NEVER TOO OLD TO HELP OUT NEEDY KIDS.

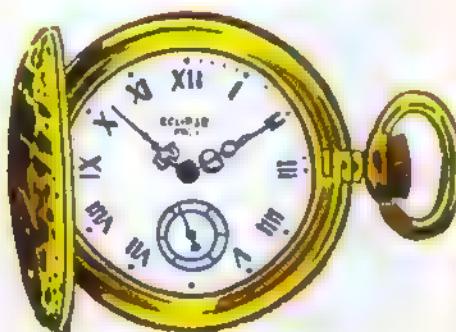


MASQUERADE'S OVER, PAL — I GOTTA TREAT FOR YOU, NAMED LT. DIMM.

WEAR BOGUS UNICEF TRICK OR-TREATERS; LOOK FOR OFFICIAL BLACK-AND-ORANGE CARTONS USED BY UNICEF VOLUNTEERS, TO RAISE FUNDS FOR CHILDREN WORLDWIDE. TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY RELIEF



ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
OCT. 29, 1979



MIKE MIST

MIKE MIST

Stamp of Suspicion

Δ MIKE MIST / MINUTE
PRIVATE EYE / MIST-ERY

© 1979
by
Collins
Budd

MR. MIST - I'M PHIL ATELY -
ACCOUNTANT FROM DOWN
THE HALL?



I'VE JUST HAD A CALL FROM
MY HOME - MY NEIGHBOR,
WHO LETS MY DOG OUT
WHILE I'M GONE, HAS FOUND
MY SAFE OPEN -



Soon -

MY PRICELESS
RARE STAMP
COLLECTION - STOLEN -
HANG IN THERE, ATELY.



and -

I'LL TAKE
HIM -

WHAT HAVE YOU
FOUND, LT. DIMM?



"SAFE, PHONE, WINDOWSILL,
EVERYTHING WIPE CLEAN
OF PRINTS -"



I'M THE NEIGHBOR WHO -

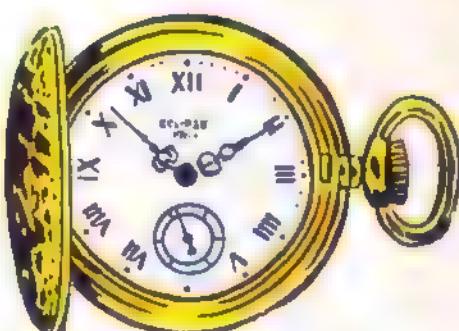
WHO STOLE THE STAMPS.
YES, I KNOW.



BACK OF FINGERPRINTS WAS
SUSPICIOUS: THE NEIGHBOR'S
PRINTS SHOULD'VE BEEN ON
THE PHONE AT LEAST; ALSO, THE
DOG WOULD'VE ATTACKED ANYONE
BREAKING - and - ENTERING.



ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
NOV. 5, 1979



MIKE MIST

MIST

Final Chapter

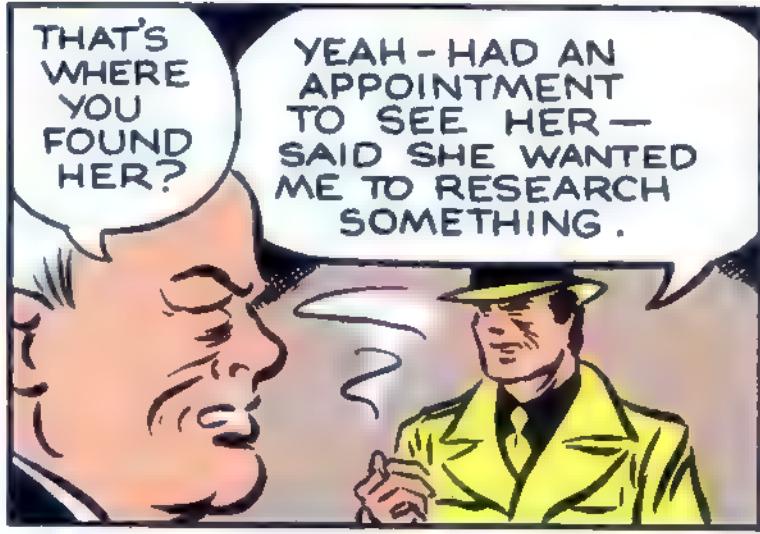
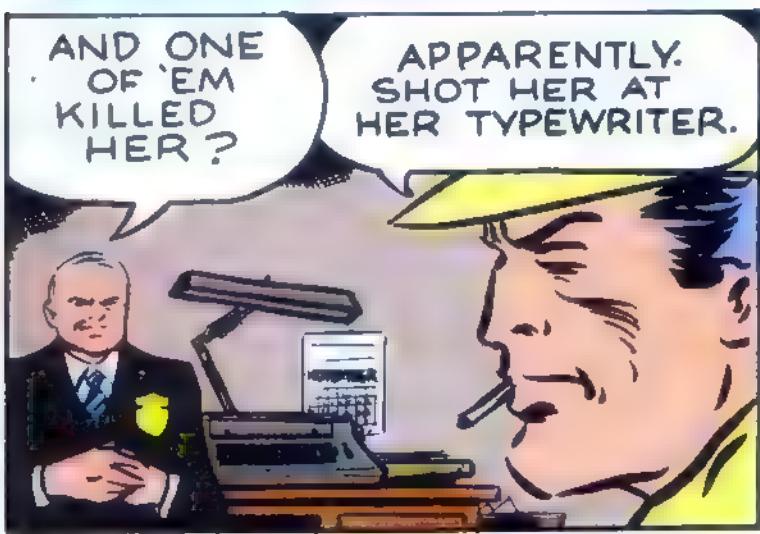
A MIKE MIST PRIVATE EYE MINUTE
MIKE MIST BY BETTY BETTY

BY
Collins
and
BETTY



BESS SELLERS—HER BOOK SALES NUMBERED IN THE MILLIONS—and SO DID HER ENEMIES.

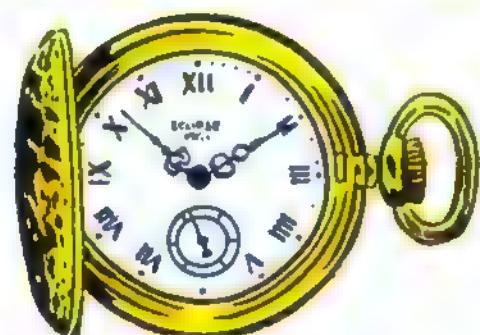
HER NOVELS WERE THINLY DISGUISED RE-TELLINGS OF SCANDALS IN THE LIVES OF MOVIE STARS AND JET-SETTERS.



WHEN INFORMED of HIS WIFE'S DEATH the HUSBAND ASKED, "WHO DID IT?" SUGGESTING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE of FOUL PLAY.



ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
NOV. 12, 1979



MIKE

MIST

It Happened in the Night

△ MIKE MIST / MINUTE
PRIVATE EYE / MIST-ERY

©1980 by Collins and Beatty



△ RICH CLIENT, HAPPY WITH
MY WORK, INVITED ME
ABOARD HIS YACHT FOR
THE WEEKEND.

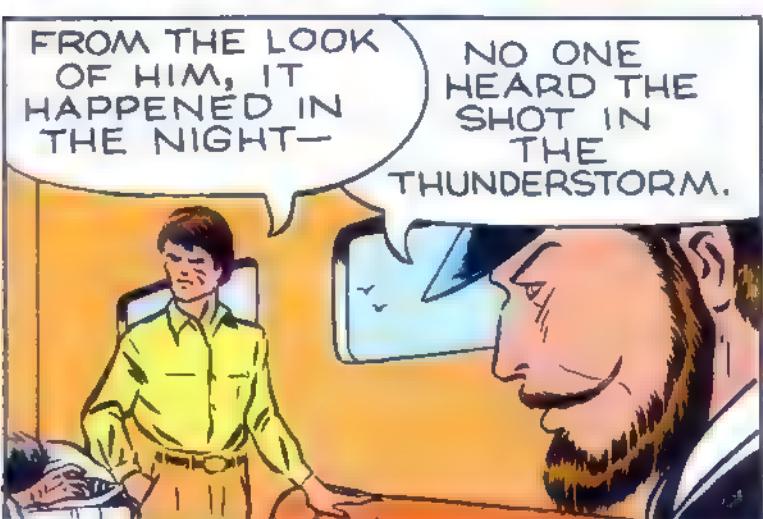
YOU LOOK
BEAT, MIKE—

I DIDN'T SLEEP
WELL— TOSSSED
AND TURNED,
AND SO DID THE
SHIP.



MIKE— IT'S
MY BROTHER—
HE'S— HE'S—

TAKE IT
EASY, NORA—

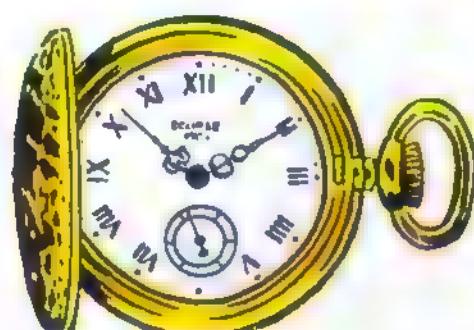


CAPTAIN, I DON'T KNOW
WHO DID THIS, BUT IT SURE
WASN'T SUICIDE.

THE SUICIDE NOTE WAS AN
OBVIOUS PLANT; THE VERY
LEGIBLE NOTE COULDN'T HAVE
BEEN WRITTEN DURING THE STORM.



ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
MAR. 17, 1980



MIKE MIST

MIKE MIST

Murder Cruise

A MIKE MIST / MINUTE PRIVATE EYE MIST-BY

©1980 by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

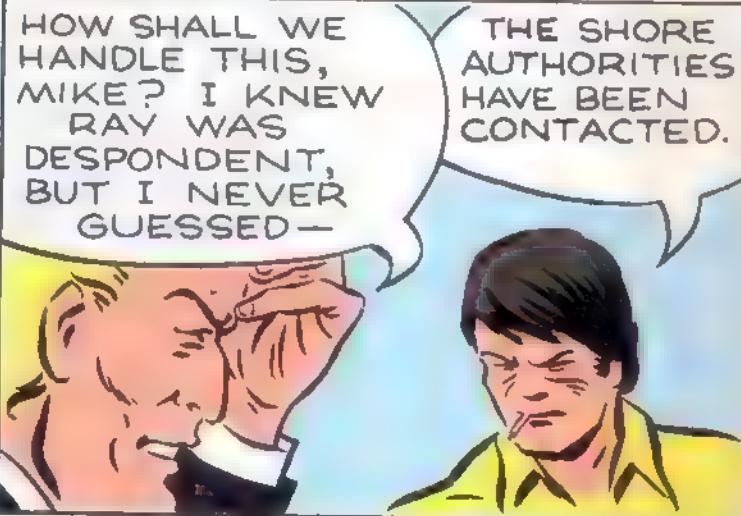


MY CLIENT, PHIL C. LUCRE, INVITED ME FOR A PLEASURE CRUISE ON HIS YACHT—

BUT ANOTHER OF HIS GUESTS TURNED UP DEAD—



SHORTLY, ON DECK—



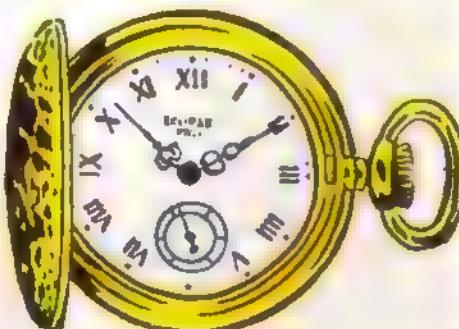
AND WHEN NORA'S HUSBAND APPROACHES...



WITHOUT BEING TOLD, PHIL KNEW ABOUT THE "SUICIDE"; NICK, HEARING RAY'S BEEN "KILLED", ASSUMED FOLLY. (RAY'S FORTUNE WAS WILLED IN EQUAL SHARES TO NICK'S WIFE NORA, AND HIS BUSINESS PARTNER, PHIL.)



ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
MAR. 24, 1980

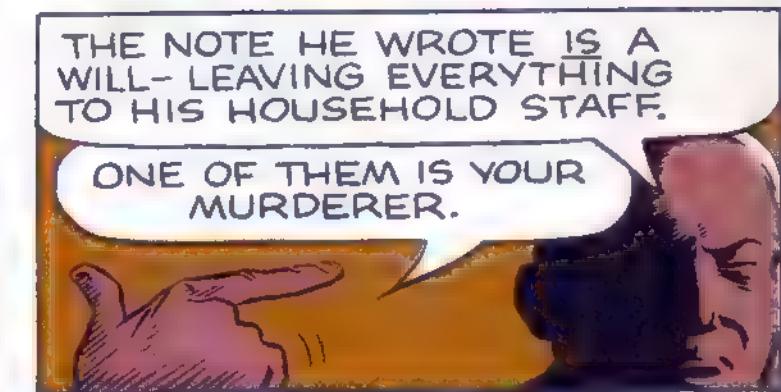
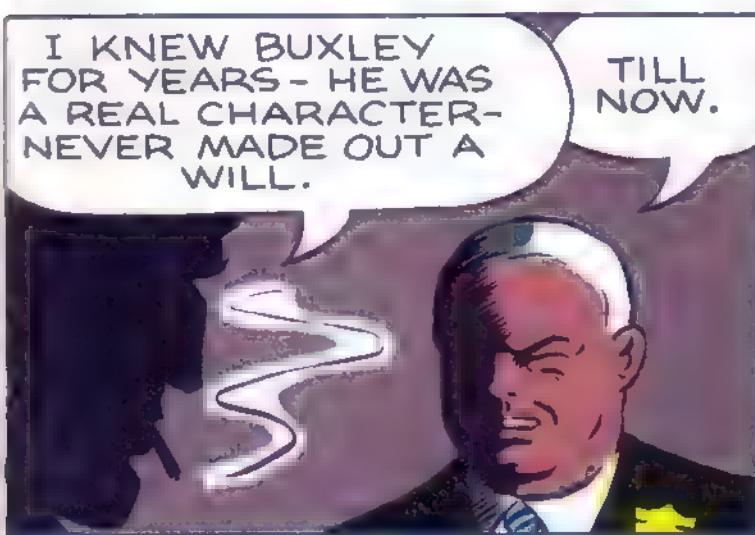
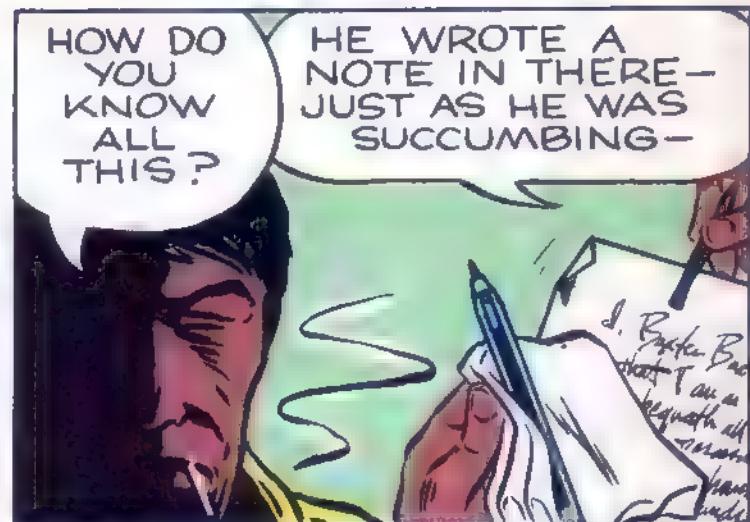
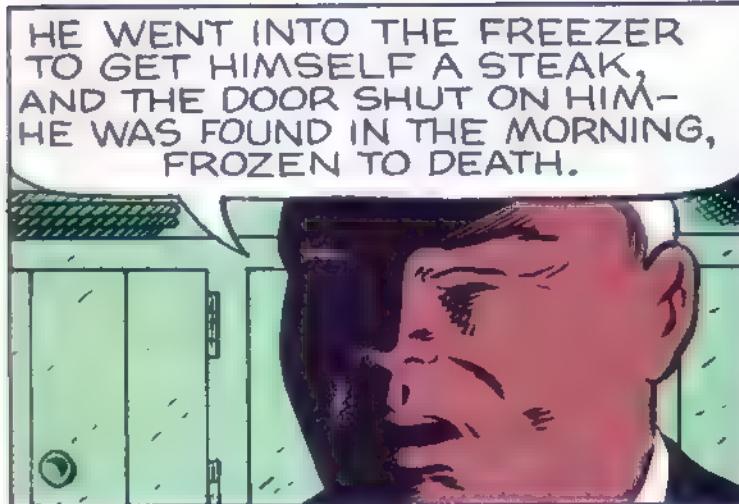
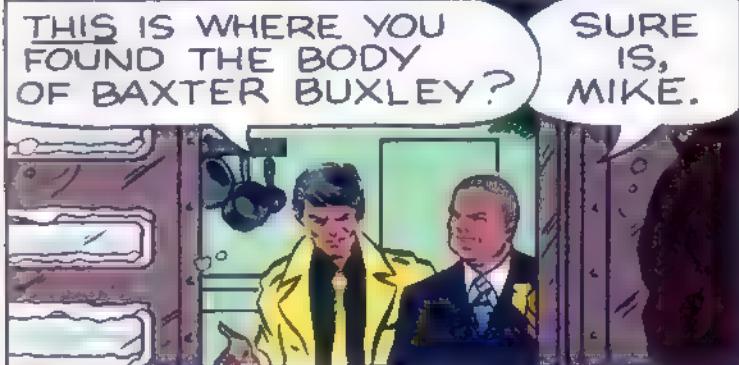


MIKE

MIST

Chill Will
©1980 by
Collins
and
Bettie

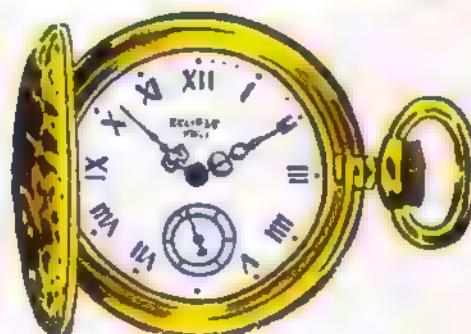
A MIKE MIST/MINUTE
PRIVATE EYE /MIST



HE WILL WAS A PHONY: IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT BUXLEY WOULD CARRY A SHEET OF TYPING PAPER and a pen in his pajamas;



ORIGINALLY
PUBLISHED
MAY 5, 1980



MURDER *at* MOHAWK

A MUST-TREE

TALE

PART TWO

© 1984

Max Collins and Terry Beatty

IN A SNOWBOUND HOTEL FILLED WITH THE SURVIVING PLAYERS OF A THIRTY YEAR-OLD MYSTERY, FORMER DESK CLERK ELWOOD EPPERLY CAN NO LONGER BE COUNTED AS "SURVIVING"...

MY GOD!
I'LL GET THE MANAGERS -

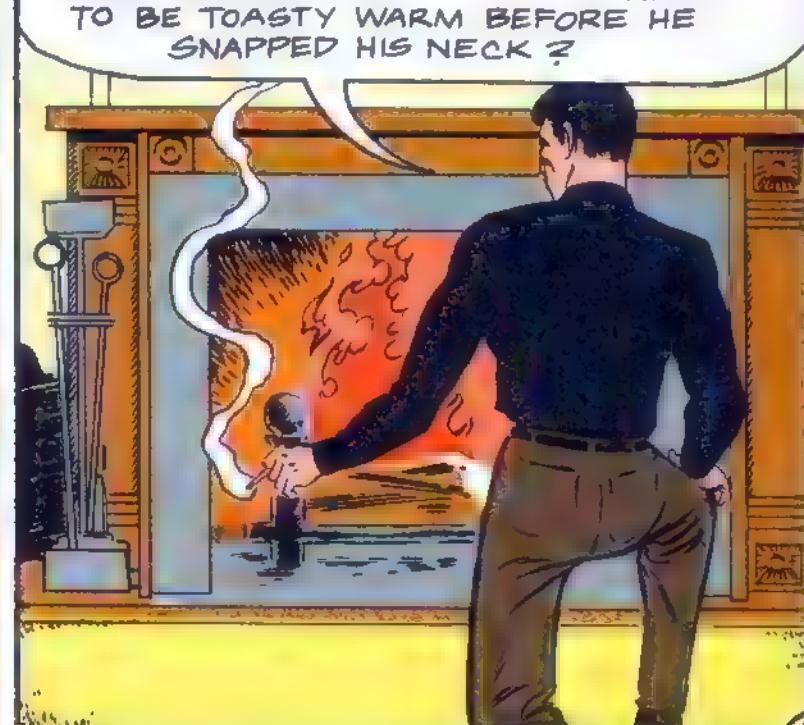
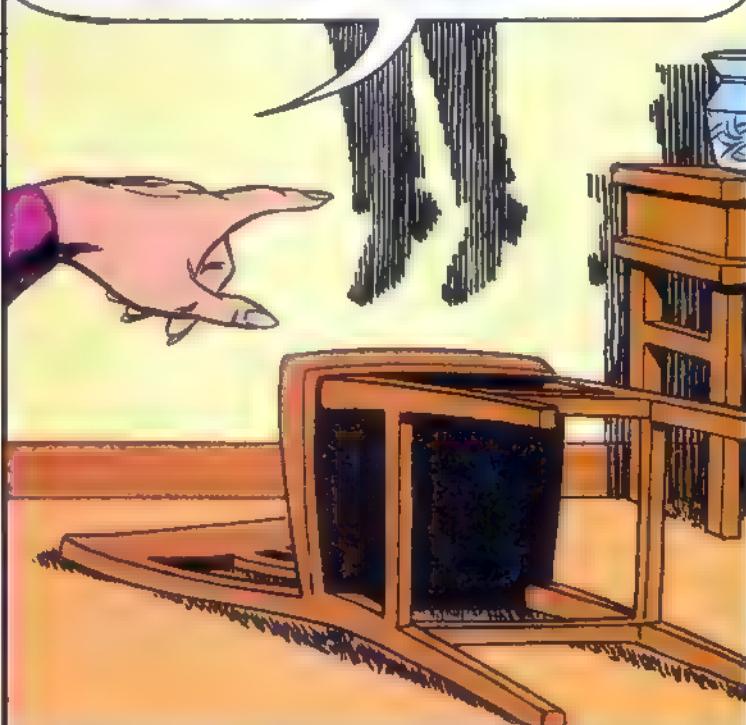
WE'D BETTER GET HIM DOWN -

NO RUSH -
HE'S NOT GOING ANYWHERE
... LET'S HAVE A LOOK
AROUND FIRST -



HERE'S THE CHAIR HE STOOD ON -
AND PRESUMABLY KICKED OUT
FROM UNDER HIMSELF -

WHY WOULD A MAN ABOUT TO COMMIT
SUICIDE BUILD A FIRE? IT HASN'T
BEEN GOING LONG - DID HE WANT
TO BE TOASTY WARM BEFORE HE
SNAPPED HIS NECK?



HE HASN'T BEEN DEAD LONG — RIGOR HASN'T SET IN —

HEY!
THAT LAMP
FIXTURE HE'S
TIED TO IS
GIVING —

I'VE CAUGHT PRETTIER BOUQUETS! HELP WITH THIS STIFF, WILL YA, MS. TREE?



WE RESTED THE LATE ELWOOD EPPERLY ON HIS STOMACH; THAT HAD BEEN MY SUGGESTION, BECAUSE I'D NOTICED SOMETHING —

BACK OF HIS HEAD'S CAVED IN...

UNLESS I MISS MY GUESS —

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MIST?

PULLING OUR FAT OUT OF THE FIRE...



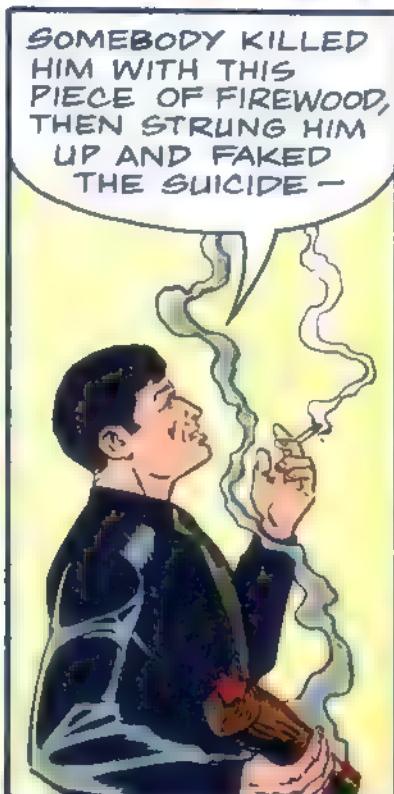
WE'D BE LAUGHED OUT OF THE BUSINESS IF WE'D MISSED THIS... THIS IS THE MURDER WEAPON — LOOK AT THE BLOOD AND HAIR...

SOMEBODY KILLED HIM WITH THIS PIECE OF FIREWOOD, THEN STRUNG HIM UP AND FADED THE SUICIDE —

STARTING A FIRE TO BURN THE MURDER WEAPON, AND FIGURING ELWOOD'S WEIGHT WOULD EVENTUALLY PULL THE FIXTURE LOOSE —

AND

THE BLOW ON HIS HEAD WOULD SEEM TO'VE COME FROM THE FALL.



WE'RE THE
MANAGERS —
WHAT'S
HAPPENED?

THERE'S BEEN
A ...

SUICIDE.
ELWOOD
EPPERLY.

I'M AFRAID THE STORM
IS SUCH THAT THE POLICE
FROM GRANTWOOD
WON'T BE ABLE TO
MAKE IT HERE FOR A GOOD
WHILE — AND THE PHONE
LINES ARE DOWN ...

WHO'S
YOUR
SOCIAL
DIRECTOR—
AGATHA
CHRISTIE?



BESIDES MIST AND ME, THERE WERE
NO GUESTS IN THE HOTEL, OTHER
THAN THE ORIGINAL CAST OF THE
"MOHAWK MASSACRE" — MINUS
ELWOOD AND THE LONG-MISSING
MASTERMIND KARPER.

GATHER THE GUESTS IN ONE
OF YOUR DRAWING ROOM AREAS
— AND YOU BE THERE, TOO.



SO WE'RE GOING TO PLAY
A LITTLE CHARLIE CHAN,
HUH? I SUPPOSE YOU'RE
NOT COPPING TO THE PHONY
SUICIDE TO GIVE THE
MURDERER A FALSE
SENSE OF SECURITY...

IS
THERE
ANY
OTHER
KIND?



AND THERE THEY WERE, DUTIFULLY ASSEMBLED; SELMA AND WHEELS,
JAILBIRDS WHO SUDDENLY SEEMED TO BE LOVEBIRDS — DONNA LEE
WESTLAKE, NOT OVER THE SHOCK OF SEEING ELWOOD HANGING THERE
— AND THE MANAGEMENT, ABIGAIL ADDAMS AND HER BROTHER DICK STARKE,
SHOWING THE STRAIN OF LOSING A GUEST IN THE OFF-SEASON.



YOU REMEMBER ELWOOD EPPERLY — DESK CLERK HERE WHEN THE KARPER GANG CHECKED IN AT THE MOHAWK AFTER ROBBING THE GRANTWOOD BANK. WELL, ELWOOD, AS YOU MUST KNOW BY NOW, HAS CHECKED OUT.



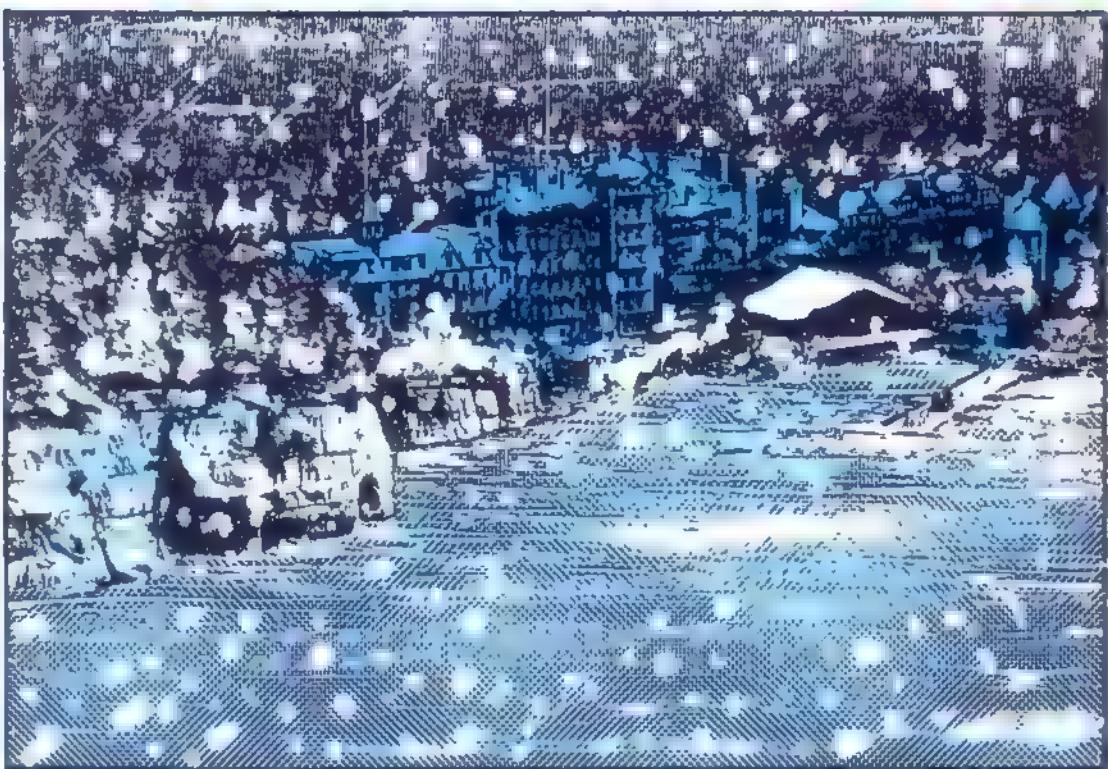
BY THE WAY, I'M MIKE MIST — A DETECTIVE EMPLOYED BY MS. WESTLAKE, WHO ANTICIPATED SOME PROBLEMS FROM YOU NICE FOLKS, FROM HER DIGGING INTO THIS OLD CASE.



AND I'M MICHAEL TREE — ALSO A DETECTIVE, COINCIDENTALLY. AT MOHAWK TO RELAX — SO LET'S RELAX, SHALL WE?



"WE'RE SNOW-BOUND, AFTER ALL," I REMINDED THEM. "AND YOU WERE ALL CONTACTED IN ADVANCE BY MS. WESTLAKE, WHO, I UNDERSTAND, PROMISED FUNDS FOR YOUR COOPERATION —"



—IN ATTEMPTING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT **REALLY** HAPPENED AT THE MOHAWK THE NIGHT AFTER THE GRANTWOOD HEIST, WHEN ALL THAT MONEY **DISAPPEARED**—



I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED...

WHEELS, NO!



SELMA, IT'S TIME...
AFTER ALL THESE
YEARS, WHAT'S THE
HARM?

"SELMA AND ME WERE
SECRET LOVERS - BUT
KARPER CAUGHT US
THAT NIGHT, AFTER SHE
SNEAKED TO MY ROOM -"

PRETTY.

I SUSPECTED, OF COURSE.
NORMALLY, I WOULDN'T
STAND IN THE WAY OF TRUE
LOVE... BUT SINCE YOU'VE
DONE THIS BEHIND MY BACK,
HOW CAN I TRUST THE TWO
OF YOU IN ANYTHING?

KARPER MADE ME GO
BACK TO THE ROOM WITH
HIM - TO KEEP AN EYE
ON ME. HE SLEPT IN A
CHAIR. I CRIED MYSELF
INTO MY USUAL DEEP
SLEEP...

SO YOU FIGURE KARPER
FELT BETRAYED AND SPLIT
WITH THE MONEY DURING
THE NIGHT?

YES - AND
CALLED THE
COPS ON US!

NO!

I'VE BEEN RESEARCHING
THIS CASE AND KARPER
FOR YEARS - NOT MUCH
IS KNOWN ABOUT HIS
BACKGROUND... HE'S A
HOMELESS ENIGMA...
BUT HE LIVED BY A CODE!

HONOR AMONG
THIEVES, HUH?

BETRAYAL WAS
SIMPLY NOT IN
KARPER'S
CHARACTER!

BULL! THAT'S HIS LEGEND
— NOT HIM!

THERE WAS
SOMETHING ELSE
THAT NIGHT —

"BEFORE I SNEAKED OUT TO SEE WHEELS, KARPER CONFIDED IN ME..."

WE'RE IN A BAD SPOT.

HOW SO?

ONE OF THESE HOTEL YOKELS RECOGNIZED US — LOOK AT THIS... IT WAS SHOVED UNDER OUR DOOR.

CUT ME IN OR COPS COME CALLING
WILL BE IN TOUCH

WHO RECOGNIZED KARPER? ELWOOD?

NAW! KARPER'S PICTURE NEVER GOT IN THE PAPERS OR POST OFFICES...

SOMEONE WITH CRIMINAL TIES RECOGNIZED KARPER — A FORMER MADAM AND HER FAVORITE STRONGARM... THE "BROTHER AND SISTER" ACT WHO ARE REALLY MAN-AND-WIFE: ABIGAIL ADDAMS AND DICK STARKE.

THAT'S A PRETTY OUTRAGEOUS ACCUSATION —

WE DON'T DENY IT. NOR DID WE WHEN MS. WESTLAKE CONFRONTED US WITH THE EVIDENCE EARLIER TODAY.

SHE'S GOING TO REVEAL OUR MOB CONNECTIONS IN HER BOOK, SHE SAYS —

WELL, WE COULDN'T CARE LESS... WE'RE WEALTHY AND READY TO RETIRE. PAINT US WITH YOUR DIRTY BRUSH ALL YOU LIKE!

THE QUESTION IS — DID YOU IN FACT RECOGNIZE KARPER?

CERTAINLY — AND WE DID SEND THE BLACKMAIL NOTE.

"BUT WHEN WE SLID A SECOND NOTE UNDER THE DOOR LATER THAT NIGHT, TELLING HIM WHERE TO LEAVE THE MONEY, HE DIDN'T COMPLY — "



DID ANY OF YOU HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH ELWOOD? DID ANYONE CALL THE FRONT DESK DURING THE NIGHT?



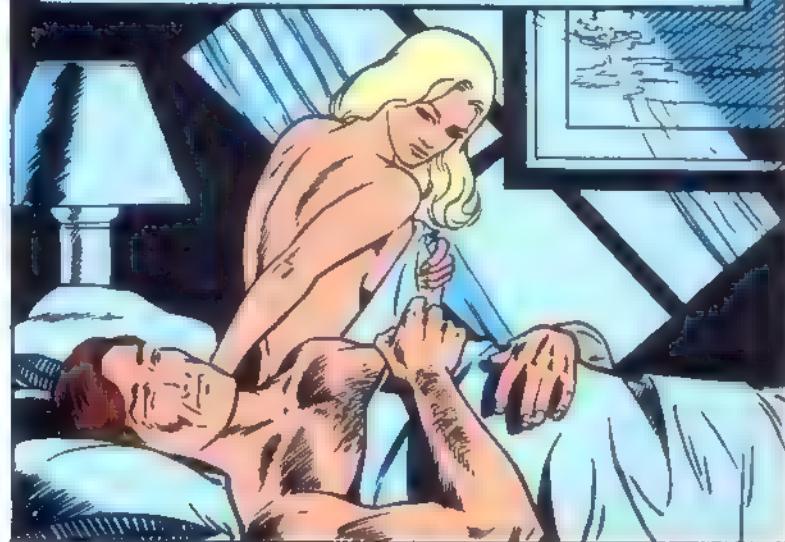
ANSWER THIS CAREFULLY — IT'S IMPORTANT. DID KARPER KNOW YOU CALLED ROOM SERVICE?



NO — HE WAS IN THE BATHROOM — I WANTED TO SURPRISE HIM.



"IT WAS BEFORE I SNEAKED OUT TO SEE WHEELS — I HAD HOPED THE RUM WOULD PUT KARPER TO SLEEP. BUT IN FIFTEEN MINUTES THE RUM HADN'T COME, AND KARPER WAS ALREADY SLEEPING, SO... "



HOW MANY OTHER GUESTS DID YOU HAVE THAT NIGHT?

ER, NONE... WE WEREN'T REALLY OPEN.

YOU WEREN'T? WHY?



WE WERE RENOVATING — WE PUT IN SEVERAL NEW FIREPLACES, FOR EXAMPLE.

TAKE ME TO THE ROOM WHERE KARPER AND SELMA SLEPT THAT NIGHT...



WHY, IT'S THIS ROOM
RIGHT HERE — THAT'S
WHY I CHOSE THIS
PARTICULAR DRAWING-
ROOM AREA FOR
OUR GATHERING...

BACK THEN,
WAS THIS
FIREPLACE IN
THE PROCESS
OF BEING
REBUILT?

WHY—
YES.

THEN GET
ME A
PICKAXE,
STARKE—

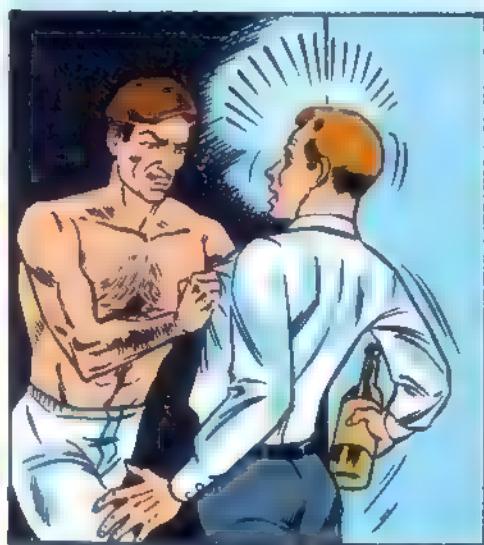
WHAT'S
GOING
ON?



I'M GOING TO TELL YOU
FOLKS A STORY—
A STORY OF WHAT
MIGHT HAVE
HAPPENED THAT NIGHT
THIRTY YEARS AGO...

"ELWOOD WAS DELIVERING
THE BOTTLE OF RUM—
WHEN KARPER OPENED
THE DOOR AND SAW HIM,
FIGURING HIM FOR THE
BLACKMAILER, KARPER
GOT ROUGH — "

"AND ELWOOD HIT HIM,
WITH THE BOTTLE."



KILLING
HIM?

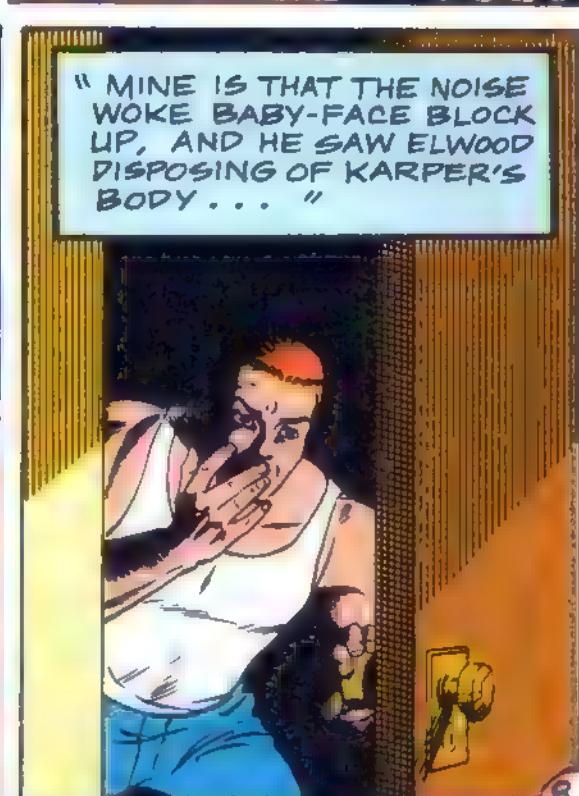
YES—
AND ELWOOD HID
THE BODY IN THE
FIRST HANDY
PLACE.

DID ELWOOD GET
THE MONEY?

MY GUESS IS
NO — WHAT'S YOUR
GUESS, MS. TREE?



"MINE IS THAT THE NOISE
WOKE BABY-FACE BLOCK
UP, AND HE SAW ELWOOD
DISPOSING OF KARPER'S
BODY . . . "



"THEN BABY-FACE TIPTOED INTO THE ROOM — THE DOOR STILL AJAR — WHERE SELMA WAS SLEEPING SOUNDLY — AND HELPED HIMSELF TO THE CASH . "



BUT BABY-FACE WAS KILLED THE NEXT DAY!

SO THE PLACE WHERE HE STASHED THE CASH DIED WITH HIM —



I'M GONNA GET STARTED, MS. TREE — THIS WON'T TAKE LONG. TALK WITH MY BOSS, WOULD YOU ?



MS. WESTLAKE —
SHALL WE CHAT PRIVATELY ?



YOU KNOW, DON'T YOU — YOU KNOW I KILLED ELWOOD... IMPULSIVELY, ALMOST ACCIDENTALLY; BUT I KILLED HIM .



I DID WITH HIM AS I DID WITH THE OTHERS — OFFERED HIM A SHARE IN THE BOOK'S ROYALTIES IF HE'D TELL ME THE TRUTH .



SO HE TOLD YOU THE TRUTH — AND YOU KILLED HIM .

BUT YOU DON'T KNOW WHY, DO YOU ?



I THINK I DO. I THINK YOU SET OUT TO CLEAR THE LEGENDARY KARPER'S NAME. I THINK YOU'RE THE HONORABLE THIEF'S DAUGHTER —



HOW —
HOW DID YOU KNOW ?



I DIDN'T —
MIST FIGURED IT OUT... HE NOTICED YOU CONSISTENTLY REFERRED TO SELMA AS KARPER'S "MISTRESS" —

LITTLE WAS KNOWN
ABOUT KARPER —
A "HOMELESS ENIGMA,"
YOU CALLED HIM —
SO WHY REFER TO
HIS GIRL FRIEND AS
A "MISTRESS"?

"UNLESS HE WAS
MARRIED, AND
YOU'RE TOO YOUNG
TO BE HIS **WIFE**—"

WHAT NOW,
MS. TREE?



NOTHING. IF THE FADED
SUICIDE GETS PAST
THE POLICE, YOU'RE
IN THE CLEAR.

"ELWOOD DIDN'T REALLY
DESERVE TO DIE — YOU
KILLED HIM MUCH AS HE
KILLED YOUR FATHER —
WITHOUT PREMEDITATION.
BUT YOU ORGANIZED THIS
WEEKEND, SO THE POLICE
MAY LOOK AT IT DIFFERENTLY."

AND NOW, UNLESS I
MISS MY GUESS, IT'S
TIME FOR A FAMILY
REUNION —



THE END

— FOR DON, ABBY AND THE MOHONK MYSTERY WEEKENDERS —



A Word of Explanation

The Mohawk hotel is based (albeit loosely) on a real lodge in upstate New York: Mohonk Mountain Lodge, where every March a "mystery weekend" attracts hundreds of mystery and puzzle fanatics. As a matter of fact, on the morning when reservations are opened for the weekend (months in advance), it proves a sell-out within hours. In March of 1983, *MS. TREE* writer Max Collins (who is writing this in the third-person for reasons not clear even to him) was a guest for the Mystery Weekend, having been invited by noted author Donald E. Westlake.

Westlake (by way of explanation for those of you unfortunate enough not to be familiar with his work) is widely known for perfecting the comic caper novel (one well-known example of which is *THE HOT ROCK*). Under his own name and various pseudonyms, he's done literally (and literally) dozens of mystery and suspense novels, finely crafted examples of modern crime fiction at its best. Under the name Richard Stark, he has written a series of books about a professional thief called Parker; it is to this cult-spawning (and movie-generating) series that Max Collins generously paid tribute by writing six novels of his own about a similar character called Nolan.

You may notice that this issue's story is dedicated to Don Westlake (and his charming wife Abby, and the Mohonk Mystery Weekend crowd in general). That's because Don in 1983 (and 1984) masterminded the Mohonk Mystery Weekend—the centerpiece of which is a mystery story acted out by the various Special Guests (usually nationally-known mystery writers, like Joe Gores and Max "third-person" Collins) and solved by the paying customers, those mystery and puzzle fanatics mentioned above. In 1983 the mystery was one vaguely resembling the story in this issue; the character portrayed by Max Collins was, at least in this issue's variation on the story, well-hung.

Whether this issue's story is Third-Person's way of saying thanks to Don Westlake—or getting even with him—is a mystery even *Ms. Tree* and Mike Mist could never solve.

Dear Max and Terry,
Ms. Tree #5.

You know, if I hadn't read a couple of *EXECUTIONER* novels last month I would never have been able to figure out where *Ms. Tree* got the idea to storm the Muerta place like that. All she needed was about twenty corpses to give it the old Executioner touch. Have to admit I liked the whole business. The party crasher in me, I guess.

Two problems with this issue. Too late to help one, and the other may already be taken care of in the issues yet unread.

A. I thought it was a bit of a pop for Dan to suddenly let us know about this business with Anne. Sure, there was a nice emotional spot there, but what we could have seen if we'd seen something between them would have been even more. Oh well.

B. *Ms. Tree* isn't wealthy, and tells us so. How can she afford Mr. Hand, then? Is it a case of "Well, I have to"? It's confusing to have them talking about the expense followed by the Tree financial statement followed by her taking him on. Would Socrates be able to put A.B.C.s in front of that train of thought?

Eric Yarber
ARLINGTON, VA

Please send your letters to:
ECLIPSE COMICS
P. O. BOX 199
GUERNÉVILLE, CALIFORNIA
95446

Probably not without getting run over, but then Socrates doesn't seem the type to read comic books. If he did, he'd write for the *Comics Journal*, though.

Actually, Eric, if you check back to issue #4, *Ms. Tree* doesn't say she isn't wealthy; she says she isn't "terribly wealthy." Her agency is a prosperous one, and she is moderately well-fixed. She can well afford to hire someone like Bryan Hand, at least on a temporary basis.

Also, withholding the information about Dan's affair with Anne had to do with, 1: planning a little surprise for the readers, and, 2: the self-imposed limitation of our telling these stories in the first person, from *Ms. Tree*'s point of view—which means she can't know about Dan's affair till Dan tells her.

Messrs. Collins, Beatty, Mullaney:

I am very disturbed by the covers on the last two issues of *Ms. Tree* (#'s 4 and 5). I even turned a copy of #5 over, because I was afraid a friend might see the cover.

I've always felt *Ms. Tree* was a bit anti-feminist. True, you are telling a story about a competent woman in a traditionally male role; but why so much cheesecake?

Despite this, I like a lot of what you are doing. *Ms. Tree* is an interesting character. You are doing something refreshingly different from most comics. And you are doing a damn good job of storytelling.

But these last two covers go too far. *Ms. Tree*'s attraction is that she is competent. Why show her as helpless on the cover? I dislike it because we have too many images of helpless women; we need images of competent ones. You should dislike it because it is misleading; both covers had a slant very different from the same scene in the story.

You are talented professionals. I'm sure if you try, you can find something better to put on the cover of the magazine than a rape fantasy

Phil Wadler
OXFORD UNIVERSITY
England

Like the patient said to the psychiatrist showing him the ink blots, "Don't look at me, doc—you're the one showin' the dirty pictures!" Rape fantasy is in this case in the eye of the beholder—neither of the covers in question seems to us a rape fantasy.

Early on *Ms. Tree* was glibly dismissed as being a comic book about a feminist. We have responded that *Ms. Tree* is a feminist only in the sense that any strong, intelligent working woman of the '80s is bound to be a feminist. She is not a political activist (except where the Mob is concerned). On the other hand, we have never been accused of being anti-feminist before; don't know what to make of that. Cheesecake? Have you ever seen *Kelly Green* or *Somerset Holmes*, or *DNA* for that matter? We have been advised by knowledgeable types that *Ms. Tree* would sell better if we did do cheesecake, to which we usually say, Go fly a kite, or other such strong language. If, in context, *Ms. Tree* needs to take off her clothes, she'll take off her clothes; but she won't soap herself in the shower or try on *Frederick's* of Hollywood nighties just for the reader's (and artist's) benefit.

We view *Ms. Tree* as the lead character of the book; as the hero (not heroine). When you put together the cover of a comic book, you examine its contents for possible scenes to showcase. Scenes in which the hero is either being actively heroic or in which the hero is being endangered are the two best options; the only other option, really, is a combination

thereof (in a mystery book, there's also the "discovery of a crime scene" gambit, as on this issue's cover). Our various covers fit into those various slots. Usually Ms. Tree is shown as quite active—for example, on #8 she's actively machine-gunning. Maybe we do have too many images of "helpless women" in our popular culture; but to remove Ms. Tree from dangerous situations on our covers to accommodate that notion would be sexist.

By the way, the cover of #5 was (we thought) an obvious homage to the cover of the bestselling mystery paperback of all-time: *I, The Jury*. Both on the cover and within the story, we did a sex reversal: in *I, THE JURY*, the villainess disrobes to distract the hero; in #6, Ms. Tree disrobes to distract a villain.

We thank you for your comments, Phil—I always wanted to get the last word in a discussion with somebody from Oxford.

Dear Max and Terry,

So far "The Cold Dish" has been a very tasty story. (Sorry, but I couldn't resist the pun.) After issue #6, it's gotten to the point where I am thoroughly puzzled. It's obvious that Dominic Muerta killed Anne for security purposes, and is now covering his tracks, but I have this feeling that there's more to it than that.

One thing I particularly like about this story is finding out more about Ms. Tree's husband, Michael. Not having read "*I, For An Eye*," I never knew that he was married and had a son before he met Ms. Tree.

Probably the most important event in this story, in my opinion, is Ms. Tree becoming Mike Jr.'s legal guardian. It would indeed be interesting if she retained guardianship of him, but I don't know if that would be the wisest move for her. I just don't picture her as the mother type. Still, I would hate for him to live with his grandparents, because I am convinced that his grandfather is connected with Muerta in some way.

I would like to commend you on the smooth transition between stories. Instead of #4 just beginning a new story from page 1, it wrapped up the loose ends from the first story and quite logically and casually led into the current one. It's little things like that that show your true skill as a writer, Max. Take a bow.

I am anxiously awaiting a trade paperback version of "*I, For An Eye*"! If you're worried about sales, rest assured that I will buy not one, but two copies. I am all in favor of issuing the various Ms. Tree stories in collected volumes. That would be great!

Now for the last suggestion (or maybe two): how about a Ms. Tree poster, Terry? Or maybe a portfolio?

Mark Pruitt
SEARCY, AR

Posters and portfolios are certainly a possibility, Mark. Read the "Important Announcement" below and you'll see good news about Ms. Tree collections.

Dear Max,

You know, I think Dan Green and Roger Freemont had a point, however oblique, in *Ms. Tree* #4: it is time, I think, that the series moved away from Mike Tree's murder and the ramifications thereof. Sure, I'm still enjoying the book immensely, and the Anne Tree situation has me hooked and intrigued (albeit reluctantly—I still feel Anne would have been of greater value to the strip as a live supporting character). But the harking-back to Mike Tree's death has dominated the last three storylines, and I think that now you should consider diverting away from this tendency before it becomes a rut.

Howard Stangroom
CLEVELAND, ENGLAND

Despite my apparent lack of respect for Socrates in a response to an earlier letter in this column, I try to be true to the logic of my stories—I allow one story to lead me into the next. While an occasional change of pace (like this issue's one-shot *Mike Mist* crossover) is fun, we are currently in a

cycle of stories, growing out of one another, that may take years to run its course.

An Important Announcement From Max Collins and Terry Beatty . . .

Anyway, we think it's kind of important. This issue is the last Eclipse-published *MS. TREE*. That, as they say, is the bad news. The good news is that *MS. TREE* is shifting over to Aardvark-Vanaheim, the Canadian publishing company that Dave Sim and Deni Sim built (using a certain cartoon aardvark named *Cerebus* as a building block).

We leave Eclipse with a sense of sadness; Dean Mullaney initiated *MS. TREE* back in 1980 when he called to ask us if we might be interested in developing a private-eye strip for a black and white comics magazine he was putting together. That magazine was *ECLIPSE MAGAZINE*, and the feature was "Ms. Tree."

Dean was brave enough to publish a feature written by a writer who had never before worked in comic books; whatever following might've been generated by *DICK TRACY* and mystery novels didn't (and doesn't) necessarily carry over to a comic book. Dean was also brave enough to entrust the art to a young man whose credits were largely in the fan press and the underground field. Launching a private-eye comic book is a sea awash with mutants and long-johns is something we will always be grateful to Dean for.

But with this issue, our contract with Eclipse has run its course. One of the basic tenets behind the formation of Eclipse is creators' rights. Dean had indicated to us that he wanted to continue *MS. TREE* — but he couldn't guarantee us our own book.

We prefer to continue on in a book of our own, not as part of a another package. A-V is seeing to it that we can do that. We will not miss a beat — the next issue of *MS. TREE* (no. 10) will appear a month from now, and a new continued graphic novel, "Deadline," will begin.

There will be a few changes that you should be aware of. We will not (at least initially) be in four-color. A-V publishes most of its books — including its star performer, *CEREBUS* — in glorious black-and-white. *MS. TREE* began as a black-and-white feature in *ECLIPSE MAGAZINE* and we have always had an aesthetic preference for it — perhaps because *MS. TREE* grows out of a film noir sensibility — which is a fancy way of saying Collins and Beatty grew up on old black-and-white crime movies.

Deni Sim (while agreeing with Collins and Beatty's aesthetic leaning toward black-and-white) has indicated that *MS. TREE* may one day return to color. Initially, though, we're going to do something in-between. Terry has long admired various Japanese and European comics that use a limited color process called duochrome. For the first projected four-issue continuity we will be using this approach — an orange-tinged red, which will give us flesh tones and various shades of orange, red and brown; and, of course, black ink as well. Chapter One, incidentally, will be titled "Black and White and Red All Over."

There are other changes (the only back-up will be a two-page *MIKE MIST*), as well as a series of trade paperbacks collecting earlier stories, but it seems as though we've run out of space. So we bid a fond farewell to sunny Eclipse and invite all of you aboard our bob sled as we begin the trek toward Canada and Aardvark-Vanaheim.

ONE FINAL NOTE by Dean Mullaney

It's been great fun these past few years, working with Max and Terry, and had it been possible for Eclipse to continue this title, we certainly would have. But no matter who the publisher is, *MS. TREE* is *MS. TREE* and I urge every one of you to take that bob sled with the guys from Iowa and give *MS. TREE* your long and continued support. I know that I will.

Next issue:

The new Ms. TREE graphic novel begins.

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